

## BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Vincent H. Yano

Vincent H. Yano was born August 8, 1921 in Honolulu. He was educated at St. Louis High School and the University of Dayton, where he received a degree in business administration. He then served in the U.S. Army from 1946 to 1947, before resuming his education at Harvard Law School.

After graduating from law school in 1950, Yano worked as an attorney for the Legal Aid Society until 1953. He worked as a legal advisor on Okinawa from 1953 to 1955. He then entered private practice.

Yano was elected to the state senate in 1962 as a Democrat, and served until 1970. From 1967 to 1968, he was the senate ways and means chair.

Tape No. 17-12a-1-88

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Vincent H. Yano (VY)

April 20, 1988

Honolulu, O'ahu

BY: Chris Conybeare (CC) and Daniel W. Tuttle, Jr. (DT)

Joy Chong: The following is an interview with Vincent Yano. It was conducted by Chris Conybeare and Dan Tuttle, and it took place at the KHET studio on April 20th, 1988. This is videotape number one.

CC: It's April 20th, 1988, and we're doing another one in our series of oral histories about Hawai'i politics with Mr. Vincent Yano. I'm pleased you could join us today. And I'm going to start the same way we have with everyone and ask you if you could describe a little bit about your early background. Where [were] you born and when, and what were your parents' circumstances at that time?

VY: My father [Sadaki] came from Japan in the early 1900s to work on the plantation. Went to Maui, and he decided he didn't like plantation work. So he learned the art of tailoring soon, then he opened a tailor shop in Honolulu in the Kalihi—in the Pālama district. And so I grew up on the other side of the tracks.

CC: How about your mom? She worked too or. . . .

VY: My mom [Mary] was born on Kaua'i, interestingly, and she was not a picture bride. I don't know how my father found her on Kaua'i, but anyway they got together. My father raised eleven children—nine boys and two girls. And we're all still alive.

DT: It's amazing.

VY: And amazingly, we're all two years apart. I don't believe that. I asked him, "How'd you do it," you know. He never told me. Even when he was about to pass away, I asked him one last time. I said, "Dad, tell me, how did you do it? I mean, birth control or something," you know. He never told (chuckles) me. But I've always been amazed how he brought us up in a, you know, modest tailor shop, bringing up eleven children.

CC: Which child were you and . . .

VY: I was the fourth [born August 12, 1921]. We had—I was the fourth and we had four boys at the time.

CC: How about school? Where did you end up when you first went to school?

VY: I went to the St. Louis High School because they had a reputation for scholastic excellence, I guess. So, in order to go to St. Louis, I had to deliver papers and do few other odd jobs.

DT: What about grammar school? Where did you go?

VY: Oh, Ka'iulani Elementary School in Pālama . . .

DT: Ka'iulani, yeah.

VY: Very fond memories there of Princess Ka'iulani.

CC: Any of that time late in elementary school or in high school, did you get interested in any kind of politics in school or anything like that or. . . .

VY: No, zero. (Chuckles) I was too busy, really, wanting to get out of the slums where I lived. And the only way is to study and work hard, that's what I'm going to do. I just wanted to get as much education as possible. And when I graduated St. Louis, I was fortunate to get the one full tuition scholarship that they had offered that year. I'm not sure how I got it, but I got it. So I was able to go to Dayton University [University of Dayton] on a full scholarship grant. Worked part-time at the university, but my family still had to send me some money. And I was the first one in the family to go to college, so I still consider myself very, very lucky.

CC: What year was that?

VC: Nineteen forty, just before the war broke out.

DT: You went to Dayton in 1940?

VC: Yes.

DT: Uh huh. So the war interrupted your education there at Dayton, did it?

VC: Funny thing, when the war started, I was in second-year ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps]. And all of us were given orders to go to Fort Benning to get our commission, you know. At the last moment, the colonel calls me in and he says, "You're not going."

I said, "Why?"

He said, "Did your father come from Japan?"

I said, "Yes. What's that got to do with it?"

He said, "Well, I'm sorry, but we're not taking any Americans of Japanese descent into the armed forces."

So I ran downtown. The navy and the air force, they had the same orders, you know. I really felt kind of betrayed that, my own country rejecting me. I've never felt good about that. After

the war, I enlisted for eighteen months. I felt you got to [do] something. But it was a good move because I got GI Bill [benefits] and I was eligible to go to law school.

DT: Mm hmm. So you graduated from Dayton then?

VY: Yeah, university in '44 . . .

DT: Before you went in . . .

VY: Because I figured that, you know, there's no sense going without myself finishing my education. The armed forces didn't want me, so.

DT: So then you enlisted . . .

VY: After the war [ended].

DT: After the war.

VY: Yeah.

DT: So you were in the army from '44 to . . .

VY: Forty-five to '47.

DT: Forty-five.

VY: Yeah, just a year and a half. And for that, I was entitled to three years of school, you know.

DT: So you . . .

VY: So I figured, "[Where] can I go [for] three years? Oh, law school, yeah."

DT: Uh huh.

VY: I wasn't interested in law particularly.

CC: Still no politics? In college, did you get involved in any school politics?

VY: No. Oh, yeah, well, because I was from Hawai'i and, you know, I was Oriental, and there were very few Orientals in Ohio. Even when I was traveling on a bus downtown, you know, whoa, I get curious and unfriendly stares all the time. But my fellow students treated me real well. So I got elected to a lot of class offices and I ended up as student body president and so forth. But that gave me a chance to do a lot of extracurricular activity. You know, I edited the yearbook and so forth. So that was fun.

DT: That gave you a lot of early experience in politics, didn't it?

VY: Well, was that politics? Yeah, I guess. (Chuckles)

DT: Yeah, sure, sure. If you're running for student office, why, that's politics of sorts.

VY: But we never—you know, we never went out to go get votes or anything. We just. . . .

DT: Well, it just happened then, huh?

VY: Yeah.

DT: Well, that's even more better, I guess.

(Laughter)

DT: So you didn't really undergo a lot of the trauma that some of the people who were here in Hawai'i underwent trying to—fighting to get into the armed forces. Oh, but you had your—you fought your own battles to get in and they wouldn't let you in, so you decided to. . . .

VY: Yeah, during those summer years, you know, Dayton has National Cash Register [Company]. They have a large swimming pool, the third largest swimming pool in the country. And I worked there as a lifeguard. And people used to look at me and say, "That guy looks healthy, I wonder why he's 4-F," you know. "He got flat feet or hearing loss," (chuckles) or something. Nobody could figure out why I wasn't in the service. And I didn't want to say it because I was kind of embarrassed and also a little bitter about it.

DT: Be difficult, sure. Would be.

CC: But law school looked like a good thing after the army?

VY: It was just convenient. I had a three-year eligibility, so.

CC: And you ended up at Harvard [Law School] or. . . .

VY: Yeah, it's a funny thing. My being a Catholic, you know, Catholic high school, Catholic college—my first choice was Georgetown [University]. So I applied to Georgetown and Harvard. And I never heard from Georgetown, and I was wondering why. When I was in New York on my way to Boston and Harvard, I get a telegram from Georgetown, "Hey, it's okay. You can come," you know.

I said, "I'm on my way already. What happened?"

They said, "Oh, we thought that [the] University of Dayton was not accredited."

Oh, boy. I felt insulted there, too. (Chuckles)

CC: Well, Harvard Law [School] is not known for its poor standards. I don't think you should feel too insulted.

VY: Well, law school was another experience. I never got to know except ten of my classmates. It was too impersonal. I didn't get to know any of the professors too well. Fortunately, I got to

know the dean because his lunchroom was in trouble and it was losing money. So my wife [Eloise] took over the management and I helped her with the books, you know. And we finally brought it into the black, so the dean was happy. So we got to know him. Dean Griswold who was later solicitor general.

CC: Was your wife from here or where did you meet her?

VY: She was born in Kapahulu [O'ahu]. And we had ten children. So. . . .

CC: But you were really gone from Hawai'i then for almost ten years.

VY: Yeah, right.

DT: But you did return to Hawai'i about 1950, didn't you? Fifty, '51?

VY: Yeah, about. Well, I went to law school '47 to '50.

DT: Forty-seven to '50?

VY: Yeah, then I returned. Then I was fortunately appointed as the first Legal Aid [Society] attorney. And I opened a Legal Aid [Society] office here. And I had the busiest practice in town, you know. A hundred cases a month, mostly small stuff. Family stuff, and rent problems, and things like that.

DT: Well, did you join the Democratic party right after you got back or . . .

VY: No, I wasn't interested in politics then, even.

DT: Oh, even then. You were just practicing law in legal aid.

VY: And at \$500 a month, I had three children and another one coming, so I couldn't make it because I had borrowed \$2,000 to study for the bar. I didn't want to take the bar more than once. And here was my debt. And at \$500 a month with three kids and a fourth one coming, you know, I couldn't make it. So I went to Okinawa for two-and-a-half years [1953-55]. Got a nice job with a free, four-bedroom house there. And, you know, everything was cheap. Everything was twenty-five cents, movies. (Chuckles) The best steak in Okinawa was two dollars, you know.

CC: What kind of job was that?

VY: I was a legal advisor. I also served on the Okinawan bench as a magistrate and helped send some of them. . . . Well, I never sent too many to jail. I thought they had a right to steal some things, so I said, "Well. . . ."

CC: Oh, so you really had some interesting times. So when did you come back from Okinawa, then? When did . . .

VY: After two-and-a-half years, had enough to pay off my debt and a few dollars in the bank.

DT: So you missed the big election of '54, then?

VY: Yeah.

DT: You were in Okinawa then, huh?

VY: Yeah, I missed it. I came back in '55.

CC: What did you—did you have any reflection on all that? I mean, from the time you left Hawai'i to the time when you really got back and got settled, there's quite a few changes in the political scene, weren't there?

VY: Oh, yeah. Very exciting. Still I didn't think about joining the Democratic party, but I was very proud that, you know, the tables had turned. I heard so many stories about plantation mentality. Spark Matsunaga always told me that when he was working on the docks at—where's 'Ele'ele and the dock . . .

DT: On Kaua'i, mm hmm.

VY: Kaua'i.

VY: He said he would be working next to a White man. They would be doing the same thing and he was getting half the pay. He never could figure that out, you know. So, that always stuck with me. He told me that they were struggling so much that (chuckles) every now and then he would go out and pick green mangoes for his dinner because he noticed that his mother would always eat last and lot of time there was just little bit left. So he would say, "Oh, I had enough," and he'd go out and climb the tree and, you know, eat green mangoes.

CC: When did you first get to know him? Did you get to know him at this point or . . .

VY: We were at law school together. He was one year behind me, although he was a little older than I was. And Spark always said—and this is kind of amazing, now this is back in '48, '49—he says, "My one ambition is to be a U.S. Senator."

And I said, "Spark, we're not even a state yet."

He said, "I still want to make the U.S. Senate, you know."

And by god, he made it. I can't believe that. I want to say that people like Dan [Daniel Inouye] and Sparky, they're really kind of almost like born for politics, you know. And having been through the process with two terms here, I admire them because I think it takes a special kind of dedication to be a public servant. Surely, there's enough money in it. There's some prestige and there's power, but, whew.

DT: Well, there's more money in it—more direct money in it these days than there used to be, that's for certain, I think, but not a great deal. But, of course, there are a lot of ancillary rewards that come along, I suppose you can say. Well, when did you first become a Democrat then? How did this happen? Here you were, sort of apolitical and you got back after the big '54 . . .

VY: I was so busy, you know, paying bills and getting my kids through school and figuring out how I was going to feed all those kids. And for some reason, being a good Catholic, I guess, never learned about birth control too early. Before I realized it, I didn't have time for much else. (Chuckles)

DT: So when did you actually join the party? Do you remember that or . . .

VY: Well, in 1961 [1962], Vince [O. Vincent] Esposito approached me. He says, "Vince, I'm running in the fourth [senatorial] district," which was from Nu'uano to Waimānalo, whatever it was. He says, "I need a running mate," because he was running against [Republican J.] Ward Russell, and Wads [Wadsworth] Yee had jumped into the race. Then he showed me mathematically how if he was the only Democrat running, that everybody coming to vote, you know, they would have an extra vote to give, right? A Democrat would vote with Vince. And he might vote for Wads or Ward, you know. He said, "If I don't have [a] running mate to offset that, you know, I might lose."

I said, "Vince, you know, I know nothing about politics, but I'll give you a hand up." And I spent \$5,000 campaigning. And I said, okay, this is, you know, a contribution to Vince. But we had a landslide that year and I got in, and, oh, boy.

DT: This was in '62.

VY: Sixty-two, yeah.

DT: Sixty-two.

VY: [John F.] Kennedy was . . .

DT: In the White House.

VY: Yeah. And I was really, you know, I was really a political accident. I didn't expect to get elected.

DT: But you obviously had quite a following in the church and other places, in social work, and places where you'd been active in community affairs . . .

VY: Yeah. Very active in the Catholic church. And as a corollary to that, when I got in, for some reason, because I'd been very active as a lay Catholic, the power was ILWU [International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union], right? The ILWU always felt that strong Catholics are by nature anti-Communists and, therefore, anti-ILWU, and, therefore, this guy [is] not to be trusted, you know. So from the very beginning of my political career, I was shut off by the ILWU. I could never get to Nadao [Yoshinaga] and his gang. So I was always on the other side, not by choice, you know. Because lot of times, I agreed with lot of the issues. I'd been pro-labor all my life. In fact, when I went to law school, I majored in labor law. I could never get into that field even.

DT: It was sort of inconsistent, too, because Jack [John A.] Burns [who was elected governor] was a staunch Catholic himself, wasn't he?



VY: Yeah, but he was also very strongly tied to the ILWU. I didn't figure it out for a long time, but I did along the way.

DT: How did you figure it? I mean, just because of association early years . . .

VY: I think the ILWU stood for a lot of things for me, you know. They led the revolution in the plantation and brought about much better working conditions and so forth. So I had a lot of aloha for the ILWU. I didn't like the fact that they had so much power. As an example, you know, there used to be one of the ILWU big wheels in the legislature, I'm sure you know who it was. And I would watch some votes on bills, you know. And I knew who all the ILWU guys were. And I would watch some bills being voted on. And this guy would be on the side. You know, in the old ['Iolani] Palace, there were open doors there on the side? And these guys would look to him and he would go like that, meaning yes, no, you know. I couldn't believe that was happening. So, anyway, I was never a member of the ILWU . . .

DT: You never received their support in election, then?

VY: No, never.

CC: Did your association with Vince [Esposito] also bring you into initial contact with Tom [Thomas P.] Gill or how did that. . . .

VY: Yeah, I guess we drifted kind of naturally because I was [a] great admirer of Tom with his land reform program and lot of things. I admire [a] lot of the legislation that was going through [in] those days. You know, real good social legislation that we badly needed. And it was great to have the Republicans out now. So I was. . . . I mean, I didn't join the first revolution which I think [was] where most of the great work was done.

DT: Yeah, you actually came in sort of wave two-and-a-half.

VY: Yeah. (Chuckles)

DT: Because the first wave came in '54, and then in '59, you had what I call the "class of '59," and then you came in, in '62.

VY: Yeah.

DT: And so there began your political career. We're going to have to pause and change tapes and then we'll continue.

VY: Okay.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

JC: The following is videotape number two of the Vincent Yano interview.

DT: We had just gotten you elected to the [State] Senate. What was your first impression of the legislature when you got in there?

VY: I was scared. Overwhelmed. I made a very bad freshman mistake. The senate president [Nelson K. Doi] at the time was pushing a bill called Bodhi [Buddha] Day. He said, "If the Christians are going to have Christmas, why not a day for Buddha," you know.

DT: (Chuckles) I remember that.

VY: Remember that?

DT: Uh huh.

VY: And a reporter came to me. "What do you think?"

I said, "I think it's ridiculous." And I got quoted, and that was my first lesson. Never talk to a reporter, and never give them any statement except one you have thought through thoroughly and written out and then, "That's my quote," you know. I made that stupid mistake. You know, that senate president voted "no" on every one of the bills I was associated with that whole session. Even [if] he was the only no, he voted no. He was telling me, "Yano, I don't like you."

DT: So that was your first baptism of fire then, I guess, you would say.

VY: Yeah, don't talk to the press unless you're ready because they'll quote you verbatim and you can't take it back, right?

DT: I guess you found out it was [a] pretty good idea not to quote one senator . . .

VY: (Whistles)

DT: . . . about another one or anything of that sort, too.

VY: Oh, boy, learn quickly.

DT: But you did find it rewarding, did you not?

VY: I . . .

DT: Enough so that you ran a second time.

VY: Well, I want to talk about that. I didn't like the process after the first year. I really was wondering how I'm going to last three more years. I was learning a lot, but it was taking me six months away from my law practice. And financially, it was a really pretty heavy sacrifice.

CC: What kind of money did they make those days?

VY: Oh, we were getting \$1,000 a month?

DT: No, \$1,000 a session, wasn't it?

VY: What's that?

CC: Thousand dollars a session?

VY: Thousand dollars a session. No, we were getting \$12,000, so they spread it out over twelve months.

DT: Oh, okay. Maybe you had . . .

VY: So we were getting paid \$1,000 a month.

DT: . . . a salary base, yeah. About \$12,000, okay.

VY: And half a year away from my law practice, you know, I was giving up, oh, lot more than that. But that was part of the sacrifice, I guess.

DT: There was another thing you wanted to talk about.

VY: Yeah, I wanted to talk about, generally—I found that the people in office are very ethical. I think integrity [was] generally good. I would say that 90 percent of [the] people in public office are honest. There is a minor 5 or 10 percent who would probably take advantage of some deals that might come to them, that might put some money in their pocket, but I didn't find too many of them.

DT: Was it your first term or the second term, I've forgotten, when you ran afoul of the abortion issue?

VY: Oh, that was 19. . . . [1970]. That was just before I left, the abortion thing. But as a follow-up of your question about ethics and integrity in the legislature, I found generally that they were sincere people trying to do a public service and solve the problems of Hawai'i and the world, and always meant well. But I think within the process of politics, there are some things that are bad. I, for one, found that what it does for your ego is the worst thing. Every day, you're told how great you are, you know, from people who obviously want something from you, want your vote or something. And pretty soon, you get to believe it. But it's very insidious because you're not really aware of it. Everywhere you go, you get the red carpet. You go to places. You don't pay at all for meals and stuff, you know. And pretty soon, you kind of expect it. And to me, that's the worst thing in politics. I had to get out to realize how much really it works on you.

DT: So you found that aspect of it sort of distasteful?

VY: Yes. When I got a chairmanship of a committee, I usually ran [the] meetings. I was usually respectful of the people testifying, but I saw some of my colleagues in other committees that I was part of, not chairman. And the way they treated some of the high executives in town, I was kind of appalled that this could do that much to a man's ego, that he could really berate a top executive, and really treat him badly. I think that's again a result of power and ego.

DT: So, nevertheless, you decided to run for a second term? Is that . . .

VY: Well, at the end of my first term [1967], I wasn't going to run again. And Jack Burns called me into his office. And I guess he had set aside the afternoon, you know, to persuade me to

run again 'cause we talked for three hours. And he said, "Vince, you want me sit in this chair and do some good for Hawai'i? We have a very close senate race, you know, only twenty-five senate seats. And if we don't get thirteen, you know, I might as well be out on the street, because I won't do any good in this chair." And you know, he begged and pleaded. Well, in the end, I said, "Okay, one more term."

DT: Was that a little bit unusual to you because you'd normally been considered aligned with the Tom Gill forces, hadn't you?

VY: Yeah.

DT: Yet here was Jack Burns persuading you to run.

VY: Yeah, yeah. Because we were fellow Catholics.

DT: Oh, I see.

VY: That was the tie.

DT: I see.

VY: Then I didn't do anything, well, anything noteworthy in my legislative career. But the abortion issue did fall in my lap because I was chairman of [public] health [and welfare committee] for a number of years. And when that issue surfaced, being a Catholic, I was definitely against abortions. But I felt that maybe I should study it, so I took six months to study the issue. I read this summary of a symposium that was held in Washington, D.C. in '68 or '69. And one of the contributors in this symposium was Father Robert Drinan. He was then dean of the Boston College law school. A Jesuit Catholic law school. And he said at the symposium that he felt that the issue of abortion should never be determined by law. I was really struck by that. I said, "Yeah, that's a real good position." That abortion should never be a matter of law. Well, if it was good enough for the dean of Boston College law school who happened to be a Jesuit that I greatly admired, I said, "That's good enough for me." So six months later, I came out and announced that, you know, I'm going to push this bill—to not liberalize abortion, just to make abortion a matter of free choice.

My fellow Catholics have never understood that. They can't separate the religious part of it from the aspect of a social issue. Women are going to get pregnant [under] whatever kind [of] law we have. And you're going to have women who never really wanted to get pregnant. And people forget that once you get pregnant and you bring a baby to full term, it's not the nine-month's commitment, it's an eighteen-year commitment, right? These are things that people forget. So there are circumstances when, you know, abortion is something that a woman would be almost forced to choose. Take a fifteen-year-old getting pregnant, you know, not even graduating high school and you're going to have the baby. What's going to happen?

CC: The law, when it first came up, was what in Hawai'i?

VY: Hundred years old and made criminals out of doctors and mothers that perform abortions. You know, I know couple of doctors who got their license taken away because they had performed abortions. I read extensively on the subject and the more I read, the more I felt,

well, even though I was known as a Catholic, that I had a higher duty, public duty to the people who elected me, to push this stupid law out of the books. That's all we did. We eliminated a bad law. But, you know, along the way, my pastor—I was then living in Kaimukī [and attending] St. Patrick's Church—my pastor on the pulpit, two weeks before the election, said, "Don't vote for this abortionist." (Chuckles)

DT: This was when you were running for lieutenant governor, I guess, in 1970 [in the Democratic primary]?

VY: Yes. Again, there's another interesting story. Tom Gill was running with Nelson Doi. But Nelson was on the [circuit court] bench in Hilo and three days before deadline, Nelson said, "I've decided I want to spend two more years on the bench so I can get a good retirement," and so forth. He just pulled out. And I felt, wow, you know, Tom was leading in the polls at that time. I think Nelson pulling out was a heavy blow. So I asked Tom, I said, "Tom, if you want a nisei candidate," that, "Nelson was obviously going to help you get some nisei votes. If you think I can do you any good, I'll run." I knew then, [George R.] Ariyoshi had already been handpicked by Burns [for lieutenant governor] and he had [been running] for eight months already. I knew I'd never catch him, but I also felt it was a good way for me to get out.

DT: Because things were. . . . I didn't mean to interrupt your discussion about the abortion issue. Because your life must have been very uncomfortable for you from. . . . Didn't make Jack Burns happy, I'm sure.

VY: You know, Burns made that become law without his signature. And I felt that that was kind of a. . . . Well, he thought he was going to run again. And to sign it would have meant a loss of a lot of Catholic support. So I thought that was a very clever but not very courageous way to have a bill become law. You know, he was a very strong Catholic, went to Mass every day.

CC: Did he ever influence the abortion discussion in the senate when you were . . .

VY: No, no. I'll give him credit for that. And I went up to see him about signing the bill, you know. And he said, "I have grave reservations."

I said, "I know how you feel, Governor, but I think [this issue] is kind of important. I think it's beyond religion." But he kept it in his desk past ten days and it became law. I think was a political decision. That was one thing that Jack did that I didn't admire.

CC: Going back a little before all that when actually Burns and Gill ran together [in 1966], were you involved at all with their campaign or . . .

VY: No.

CC: They weren't exactly the closest running mates, were they?

VY: No. It was terrible when Tom was lieutenant governor, you know. There was no communication (chuckles) between the two sides. Kind of a joke there. Actually, I think that Tom was never considered part of the mainstream of the party. He would never get the

majority Democratic vote. So he was kind of doomed, I think, not to be governor.

CC: Yet when you and he first approached that election in 1970, he was the front-runner.

VY: Yes, he was. But, you know, Tom's his own worst enemy. He's a terrible campaigner. He's very brusque with people. He's very impatient with people. He was so bright, you know. I think he's the greatest and brightest legislator Hawai'i produced.

DT: Really?

VY: Yeah, I believe that. But, you know, as a campaigner—charisma, warmth, friendliness, he didn't have too much of that.

DT: Well, the Burns forces brought in a lot of money and public relations advisors and that sort of thing for the first time.

VY: Oh, yeah.

DT: And really for the first time in Hawai'i history, you had a massive turnover of the campaign to the [Jack] Seigle public relations agency.

VY: Remember Tom Coffman's *Catch a Wave*?

DT: Yeah, he ultimately wrote a story about that, even though he'd carried the torch for Tom Gill as a reporter.

VY: (Laughs) Yeah.

DT: But this was the first multimillion dollar campaign, I guess. And this greatly affected Gill's chances.

VY: I think so.

DT: Because he didn't end up with that much. Well, you didn't have that much money to spend, did you?

VY: No. I was very late. And again, I made a mistake. I told a reporter that I'm going in pretty late and chances doesn't look too good, and she printed it. I was really furious because it's like telling my supporters, "Hey, don't put money on a dead horse," you know. Again, you know, my big mouth. I'm quoted as saying, "I don't have much of a chance but I'm going to run." (VY makes raspberry sound.) Boy, that really looks good in print, doesn't it? And I told my supporters, "Look, we're going to run as hard as we can," you know. And we did. We put out a—got a few votes but we knew we were behind, though. [In the 1970 primary election for lieutenant governor, George Ariyoshi defeated VY by 40,000 votes.]

CC: Actually, I think you [and] Mr. Ariyoshi had been partners in a business deal at one time. You knew George . . .

VY: Yes, yes. I was in real estate. And if you look at this *Land and Power in Hawai'i* book that

my friend Professor Gavan Daws and George . . .

DT: Oh, what was his name? Cooper, Cooper.

VY: George Cooper, yeah. They came to me quite a bit for some background on some of the real estate deals, you know. In fact, I'm mentioned in eight places in that book, so my friends always kid me, saying, "Oh, you're one of those guys," you know. But I think I can say that all my real estate deals was because I had to make income other than law because I had ten kids going to school. But my deals were always on the table. I can't say that for some of my senate colleagues. One of them took advantage of his position and got awarded a real estate deal which, to me, was wrong. And I went up to see Jack [Burns] about it. I said, "Jack, you know, when a public servant puts money in his pocket because of his chairmanship of a committee to these people who want certain things done"—I don't want to mention any names, but as a result of a favor to this gang or it was one company, the chairman was awarded this deal which benefitted him personally. And I told Jack I objected to that, you know. And [the] only thing he could tell me was, "Didn't you do the same thing?"

I said, "No, I don't do it because I get some knowledge in the legislature that I can use and take advantage of. Mine is all, you know, just to make a few bucks in real estate. But this is wrong."

And then, he defended the chairman. He said, "No, but he has to make a living."

I said, "Yeah, we all got to make a living, but like that?" you know. We argued for about an hour. And that's when I first started to feel a little distance between me and him. When he felt that a legislator could take advantage of his position in public office, you know, for private gain. And he meant it sincerely that the guy had a right to make a living. But I said, "Not like that."

CC: So that helped contribute to your decision to run with Tom?

VY: Well, no, it really was kind [of] an out for me. But to show you how strong ego is—I thought that was the end of it, you know, good way to get out. But in 1974, my ego said, "Maybe I got to run one more time," you know. And I ran in the Mānoa district. And again, I lost by 500 votes. If I had my Catholic following, I would have won. The guy who beat me was the same Republican, Wadsworth Yee, whom I had beaten the first time we ran. He beat me in Mānoa because the Democrats were supporting him. The ILWU gang was supporting him. God, that made me feel really terrible. But it was good. That was my last hurrah. And my ego finally got out, you know. But that's how strong ego lasts. Trying to run again. (Chuckles)

CC: We have to stop our tape right now and change tapes.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

JC: The following is tape number three of the Vincent Yano interview and this is the last tape.

DT: Okay, we were talking about your race in 1974 for the [state] senate when you sort of attempted a political comeback, of sorts. And as I recall, your district in '74 was quite



different from the one you had run in in '66. There'd been a reapportionment in there, had there not?

VY: Much smaller, yes. It was Mānoa-Makiki primarily. When I ran with Vince [Esposito], it was Nu'uanu to Waimānalo, you know. So was a whole different ball game. I think if I had not alienated my fellow Catholics with the abortion thing, I think I would have had, I believe, 500 votes. I think I could have won.

DT: In other words, they abandoned you really for Wadsworth Yee even though Wadsworth Yee had probably voted for the bill himself, hadn't he?

VY: Yes, yes.

DT: He voted for it [Yee voted against bill]. But it still, the negative side of it really affected you and rebounded to his advantage.

VY: Yes. I've been a great friend of many of the clergy in the Catholic church. Even some of the priests, you know, they really got turned off. And when I ran for lieutenant governor, one of the priests, we had our fundraising dinner and he led a group of people with placards at the [Hilton] Hawaiian Village all the way to the dinner place, you know, about twenty people lined up with anti-abortion placards. And he, this priest was leading the way. [Anti-abortion pickets were at the entrance to the Hilton Hawaiian Village but were not allowed inside.]

DT: Yeah?

VY: Yeah. I thought it was kind of unfortunate.

DT: You said there were other things you wanted to talk about the abortion issue.

VY: Yeah, the bishop [of Honolulu], Bishop [John J.] Scanlan, he really was shocked when I announced, after six months of study, I was going to push the free choice bill. He did a lot of things, like he tried to call together—there were about twenty, twenty-five Catholics in [the] legislature at that time out of seventy-five serving—and he called a meeting of the Catholic legislators in the state capitol. He used one of our conference rooms. And he said that he was going to bar the reporters. I said, "Bishop, you cannot do that. I mean, if you're going to use public facilities, you have to have reporters there. I mean, you can't do that. If you want to have a private meeting in your cathedral, it's okay. But not here." He was furious at me. He had a meeting, but reporters were there. So he wrote me off his book that day. (Chuckles)

DT: I see. But you continued to remain in the Catholic church, though, haven't you?

VY: Yes, but then, again, because of my participation in politics and my ego and so forth, I finally did a stupid thing. I affected my family life. So it finally led to a divorce ten years later. And I got remarried. When I got remarried, the church said, you know, I can't partake of the sacraments anymore. So now, I'm in a meditation group in Makiki. And I've been to India and I'm following that. I'm perfectly comfortable there.

DT: In other words, you didn't join any other church, but . . .



- VY: No, no. It's more like a philosophy. I'm surprised how deep and how ancient the Indian scriptures go, you know. It gives me everything I need to be on the spiritual path.
- DT: So the abortion issue really sort of adversely [affected] your political life, it affected your family life, and all sorts of things.
- VY: Yeah. (Chuckles)
- CC: What effect did the bishop's intervention have with those Catholics in the legislature? Did some of them—did all of them line up with him? Or did some of them vote . . .
- VY: Well, fortunately, you know, some of them saw the logic that we don't vote because of our religion. That our public trust is a little bigger than that. So a lot of them voted for it. I had a real problem. The senate, you know, we had seventeen votes out of twenty-five, but when we went to the house, we didn't have the twenty-six. And I had to do a lot of bargaining over there. We finally ended up with needing five votes from the Big Island. And I remember couple of the legislators, Stan [Stanley] Roehrig and. . . And we finally put in this clause about, you couldn't allow abortions where the fetus would be viable, so beyond six [three?] months, you know, it would be considered no-no. So after making a lot of compromises, we finally got, we ended up with thirty votes, but it was touch and go all the way. I had a good time trying to get this bill passed in the house. [In the house, the final vote was twenty "no" of fifty-one members—six Republicans and fourteen Democrats.]
- CC: So, even though it was very hard on you and all that, there was still something about the challenge that you sort of enjoyed rising to the occasion, is that . . .
- VY: Yeah, well, once I felt that this was something necessary. We were the first state in the country to pass this law that got rid of this old law in 1970. And then, New York followed, and then the state of Washington followed. And Illinois. I went to the state of Washington and Illinois to lobby for their bills, you know. State of Washington had a referendum and this is, I think, true throughout the country. Fifty-five percent voted for the bill and 45 percent against. Illinois was too strong. New York, I think, the governor vetoed it and it cost one legislator. It was a matter of one vote to override the veto and it cost him his seat. And, there're only four states that really passed the bill. But I felt that the Supreme Court would come through in about five years. Well, in '73, Wade versus Roe [Roe vs. Wade] came out and that's it. It was a seven-two decision. Now, I think, there's some danger that with some of the new justices in there, I don't know about this guy [Anthony M.] Kennedy, but he could swing it to five-four against the abortion decision. It could happen.
- CC: So the issue then could go back to the state legislature.
- VY: Yeah. And it's going to be kind of sad because we might. . . Well, this thing is so emotional, you know. But I think that survey after survey has showed that, I think, 55 to 60 percent of the people in U.S. are in favor of free choice. But the ones against are still very vocal and very organized and very determined that this is the worst thing, this is murder, and so forth.
- CC: It's easy to be against something in some ways in political circles, right? I mean, you can mobilize people against something.

VY: Yes. You know, I've been pushing fluoridation for ten years. And my opinion, it makes a lot of sense. All our military bases have fluoridated water. There's no question about the facts that it helps reduce cavities and [is] good for dental health. Even the dentists are for it and every major health organization is for it. And yet, we lose time after time because when you bring out the guys who say about how bad fluoride is et cetera, et cetera. You know, it's one part per million that you put in the water, it helps. You have to drink a bathtub full of fluoridated water to die or (chuckles) whatever. But the antis, really, you know, it's easy, like you say. You can influence people being against something.

DT: Now, fluoridation's not an issue to further your political career with.

VY: Never.

(Laughter)

CC: Maybe it'd be good, Dan, if you could get us into a discussion of just sort of some reactions to some other events in politics.

DT: Yes, I want to first before we move in to getting reactions, the Democrats came up with a legislative program about the time you got elected the first time. I think in the house, the so-called New Hawai'i program, and I think you probably voted in favor of most of that bill. Do you have any recollections of that?

VY: New Hawai'i?

DT: New Hawai'i program.

VY: What were some of the . . .

DT: This was a whole package of land bills and tax reform bills, so forth, that were put together by Elmer Cravalho in the house. Well, you may have missed the action because it was in the house, and so you. . . . But it was programmed under the label, the New Hawai'i program.

VY: Like, you know, reform of worker's comp [compensation] and labor law and . . .

DT: Whole package of laws, yeah.

VY: Yeah, I don't remember it as a New Hawai'i package, but I would be in favor of, I would say, almost all of it, yeah?

DT: You don't have any vivid recollections of what this meant? This was a result, as I recall, of legislative impatience with the fact that the governor [Burns] had not come out with a real program right after he had gotten elected for the first time, you see. And so, in the failure of that, why, you had to develop a program in the legislature.

VY: I must say that when I got elected, much of that had already come to pass, I think. And I was very proud to be part of a party that had put through this. You know, our laws were a model for a lot of states all over the country. We had model laws. And we had states enact our laws in their states. To me, even though we were out in the Pacific, I think we had a great impact

on social legislation.

DT: Throughout the nation.

VY: Oh, yes, yes.

DT: Well, now, I'm going to give you some names and have you react to them in politics and see what your appraisal was. For example, maybe you've already reacted to Jack Burns, but maybe you have some other comments you'd like to make about Jack Burns.

VY: I believe that Jack will go down as the greatest governor we've ever had. I feel that it's unfortunate that he was so beholden to the ILWU. I don't like the abuse of power. The unions, I think, got too strong. I remember two union members coming up to me and we had the debate on the Maryland [land] law where lessees could buy the land in fee [the land reform act]. Well, I felt strongly [that] everybody had a right to land and no estate or trust should hold a disproportionate amount of land for their own. And there's a law in England that made it mandatory that big landed trusts could only hold 20 percent of their assets in land, which made sense to me. Well, I was going to vote for the Maryland [land] bill, but in the senate it was very close, you know. In fact, it was [George] Ariyoshi [who] held the deciding vote, if you remember. Well, they [the unions] came to visit me and says, "If you don't vote for this bill, we're not going to help you next year with some funds."

Well, that, to me, I really reacted to that. I said, "Listen, I don't care if you guys never support me anymore, but I think it's terrible you guys think you guys can tell me how to vote." I was going to vote for it anyway, you know. But that's an example, to me, of abuse of power.

DT: So you feel that maybe the Burns forces abused their power and position. The union, in particular, abused its power, position.

VY: I think so, in some instances. But generally, I'm very proud of what the ILWU has done. And I'm in sympathy with a lot of things that they had. But when you have, you know, who said power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely, whatever. I believe that. So that's the power that I don't like. The Maryland [land] bill was an interesting study.

DT: Yeah, it certainly was. I guess George Ariyoshi was forced to remember that till he left office and probably still does today. What about Frank Fasi?

VY: Frank has been, in my opinion, a maverick. I don't like. . . . I really never felt comfortable with Frank. I still don't. I think, in a way, he's an excellent, good politician. He's a good vote getter sometimes. And I think, generally, he's not a bad public servant. However, sometimes when I look at the way people have raised funds for him and all that, I'm a little uneasy. I feel that I do question sometimes the means. To me, it's like [Ronald] Reagan, you know. He lets people under him do some things that are really bad. And he kind of looks away. Reagan supporting [Edwin] Meese is something I can't understand at all, but I got to say he's loyal.

DT: Well, Fasi had some of the same problems with the Catholic church, I guess, that you had, sort of, in his own way.

- VY: No, he generally represents himself as a model Catholic and that he's a strong church man and all that.
- DT: Well, with his second marriage, why, this posed a problem. So now, it looks like he's been more tuned to the fundamentalists. Joyce, his wife, has been quite a fundamentalist person.
- VY: Oh, is that right?
- DT: Yeah.
- VY: Oh, well.
- DT: In his own way, he's had some problems, maybe not exactly like yours, with the Catholic church, his own church.
- VY: But I think he generally builds an image of being a good Christian, you know. So. But I just don't like the way he raises funds for his political campaigns.
- DT: Too expensive, huh? (Chuckles)
- VY: Yeah. Two hundred fifty dollars a ticket, you know. And he can get it because the engineers and all the guys who get county contracts, you know, architects, et cetera, I mean, they buy whole tables and they get contracts. And that goes on in the state, too.
- DT: That's sort of the name of the game in politics, 1988, that's for certain.
- VY: Yeah, I think that's the sad part, you know. And you can contribute \$5,000, and you get some lucrative contracts. I don't like that at all. But like you said, that's the name of the game, yeah?
- DT: I mention Tom Gill in part because I know you talked quite a bit about him, but he considered a comeback in what was it, 1986. You have any other reactions . . .
- CC: Yeah, he was testing the water [as a candidate for governor], that's for sure.
- DT: Yeah, he was trying to jump in. Did you become interested in that time or . . .
- VY: Horse had left the barn and it was (chuckles) gone, I think. I think it was hard to revive at that time. Already he had not been in the limelight almost too long. And people have short memory. And you know, the young generation, they don't know who Tom Gill is.
- DT: But that wasn't enough to tempt you to get reinvolved in some of . . .
- VY: Oh, no. No, no.
- DT: You didn't want to help him in '86?
- VY: I have had it. It had made a mess of my life. I cannot look back to politics and say I enjoyed it, you know.

DT: I see, uh huh.

VY: I really never enjoyed the process. I hated to be out there waving signs on the street, you know. Wow, it's, to me, demeaning to say, "Please vote for me," and you're putting on this false smile. I never enjoyed that at all. Although, they don't—do they do that in other states, too, where they stand on street corners and . . .

DT: Not nearly so much. They're not as compact as a state. It does happen, but not too often. This was sort of a local invention, I think, of Charlie [Charles M.] Campbell who had started it.

VY: Yeah, right.

DT: And other people have picked it up and they feel they must do it. What about Ariyoshi? Do you have a reaction to him?

VY: George and I, we've had some differences. He was in couple of my land syndicate *huis*, where we made some money together. But on the Maryland issue, I took real issue with him on that, you know. I said, "You have given three reasons why you don't like the Maryland bill, but those three reasons have, to me, no connected logic. What are you saying? This is a good bill, I think we got to pass it." But he went ahead and became the hero of Bishop Estate and the Hawaiians, or whatever. That's okay.

I was called to task by the Bishop Estate trustees right after that bill and they were trying to persuade me to change my vote. So one afternoon at Bishop Estate, the five trustees grilled me for three hours, you know. Say, "How come you feel so strongly about this bill?"

I said, "Well, you know, it's kind of a natural right for every citizen to have a piece of his own land. And I don't like you guys having too much of it, you know." And I think that statute—I called attention to the British statute which made a lot of sense.

DT: Well, we thank you very much. You have anything else, Chris?

CC: No, I think that's good.

END OF INTERVIEW

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